

# HUMAN USE MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGIC DIRECTION FOR THE FUTURE

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## **SUMMARY**

This paper describes the context for a strategic direction for human use management. Three strategic goals and examples of the types of actions that will need to be taken to achieve those goals are outlined and considerations for implementation are discussed.

### **1. WHY IS IT NECESSARY TO MANAGE HUMAN USE?**

The protected heritage areas managed by Parks Canada are dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, understanding and enjoyment. While providing these opportunities, Parks Canada must also address ecosystem stressors to ensure that ecological and commemorative integrity is maintained or restored for present and future generations.

Recent State of the Protected Heritage Area Reports (1) identified a number of ecosystem stressors and the Report of the Panel on the Ecological Integrity (EI) of Canada's National Parks (2) (referred to from this point as the Panel Report) echoed these findings. The Panel Report indicated that the majority of ecological stressors, significantly affecting most national parks, are human related, whether originating from inside or outside the park. They included, though are not exclusive to, habitat loss, over use and habitat fragmentation.

The importance of understanding, influencing and managing the relationships between people and protected heritage areas is reflected in Parks Canada legislation, policies and reports and by various third party reviews, beginning with the Banff-Bow Valley Task Force (3). The Panel Report and the subsequent Parks Canada responses -- Parks Canada's Action Plan (4) and First Priority Report (5) – identify human use management as a cornerstone to effective protected heritage area management. This is reinforced in the recommendations of Minister's Round Table (2001) (6) and the Parks Canada's response to it (2001) (7).

### **2. DEFINING THE APPROACH**

Ecosystem management in Parks Canada recognizes that people are part of ecosystems and that people have and will continue to influence ecosystems. Elsewhere this concept has been defined as the human dimension (8) of ecosystem management. There are many approaches to studying human/environment relationships some of which are disciplinary (e.g., sociology, anthropology) and some of which are interdisciplinary (human ecology, leisure sciences, landscape ecology) (9). The challenge is to understand the many aspects of human/environment relations, agree upon goals and objectives and implement actions to achieve desired results.

Parks Canada has used a variety of approaches and terms to describe its approach to understanding and managing the many aspects of human/environment relations. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Parks Canada had a social science program and developed both a concept and process for management of visitor activities. However, program reviews and organization change resulted in a virtual elimination of significant program activity in these areas. The subsequent adoption of an ecosystem approach has resulted in the recognition that Parks Canada must reinvest in what is now being described as human use management, as well as in social science research.

Human use management is defined as understanding, influencing and managing the relationships between people and protected heritage areas. It was originally defined as the direction and guidance of people, their numbers, behaviour, permissible activities and necessary infrastructure. In recent years, Parks Canada has broadened the concept to encompass understanding, influencing and managing human/environment relationships in the greater park ecosystem. The objective of human use management is to allow people (visitors, local/regional residents, aboriginal people, stakeholders) to interact with a protected heritage area without negatively and permanently affecting the area's ecological integrity or the quality of the heritage area experience (10).

For human use management to contribute effectively to the achievement of Parks Canada's mandate it must be informed by research and monitoring and supported by well-developed and focused communications that inform, influence and involve Canadians. "Human use management is as much about providing people with the right information at the right time to support the right decisions as it is about having the right numbers at the right place at the right time" (11). Legislation, regulations, policy and, more specifically, park management plans, developed and implemented in collaboration with the public, will also continue to provide direction about strategic goals, objectives and actions for human use management at the field unit level.

At the request of the Executive Director of the Ecological Integrity (EI) Branch, National Parks Directorate, Parks Canada, a working group (12) was formed in the August 2002 to develop a strategic direction for human use management. The need for this strategic direction was reaffirmed at a national EI Forum in the autumn of 2002. The result was a draft strategy which will be included in a broader strategy for EI. The three goals for human use management are as follows:

- To increase usable knowledge about managing human use and the human dimensions of greater park ecosystems through improved information, insights, predictions, decision-making and implementation of solutions.
- To strengthen Parks Canada's capacity to work collaboratively to understand, influence and manage relationships between people, protected heritage areas and greater park ecosystems.
- To improve opportunities for Canadians and international visitors to understand, appreciate and enjoy protected heritage areas while maintaining ecological and commemorative integrity.

Table 1 is an example of the range of proposed actions for achieving the first goal. This is followed by a discussion of the considerations for implementation.

**Table 1.** Example of the Range of Proposed Actions for Achieving the Goal of Increased Usable Knowledge

| <b>Result:</b> Usable knowledge (i.e. information, insights, predictions, solutions) for improved decision-making that addresses ecosystem stressors and human use management issues.  |   |               |
|--|---|---------------|
| <b>Objective 1</b>   | <b>Actions</b>  | <b>Target</b> |
| To increase Parks Canada’s social science research capacity and integrate relevant research with the monitoring program to provide usable knowledge (information, insights, predictions and solutions) that addresses ecosystem stressors, human use management issues | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a program to implement and maintain human use measurement systems (visitation and patterns of use) for national parks</li> </ul>   | TBD           |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop and integrate a set of core indicators and associated protocols related to public understanding and support, human use and stressors (inside and outside protected heritage areas) for incorporation in the national monitoring program</li> </ul> | TBD           |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish funding partnership with Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for a cost shared social science research program focused on human interactions with protected heritage areas</li> </ul>  | TBD           |
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff the Chief, Social Science Research position recommended by the third party review of social science and the Parks Canada Science Strategy (13)</li> </ul>  | TBD           |

### 3. CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

#### 3.1 Adopt A Broad View of Human Use Management

The human/environment relationships is broader than just human induced stress on ecosystems within a national park and includes consideration of interactions between individuals and groups and between humans, protected areas and greater park ecosystems. Adoption of a broader view is consistent with the principle of taking an integrated ecosystem based approach to management. The concept of human dimensions in ecosystem management is a key component to understanding the interface between protected heritage areas and greater park ecosystems, particularly for smaller parks. Human use management has evolved from its original definition in the Banff Bow Valley Study that focused managing people who visit a park to a broader view that considers the role of humans in the greater park ecosystem as well.

#### 3.2 Focus On Improved Social Science Research and Monitoring

In the short term, Parks Canada will focus on improved social science research and monitoring that is integrated with other science and decision-making. The Parks Canada Science Strategy takes an integrated approach to science that must now be implemented. This will be accomplished through investments in improved social science research capacity and specific initiatives such as human use measurement. The planned partnership with the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), which may result in matching dollars from SSHRC for national park oriented social science research, will contribute to the required short-term investment. Improved social science research will also be achieved through active involvement of the human use management and social science specialists in the development and implementation of the Parks Canada ecosystem science and monitoring program. Future social science research projects must be developed in cooperation with ecosystem scientists and will need to demonstrate their contribution to broad ecosystem management research questions and decision-making.

### **3.3 The Role of Management Plans**

Park management plans, developed and implemented in collaboration with key constituents, will continue to provide direction on strategic goals, objectives and actions for managing human use at the field unit level. As a key accountability document, they will be guided by contemporary legislation, policy and agreements and informed by natural and social sciences, monitoring and State of Parks reporting. Consistent with the Guide to Management Planning (14), management plans will define the array of opportunities for understanding, appreciation and enjoyment to be provided and the appropriate activities, services and facilities to be offered. It will describe strategies for managing human use and targets for maintaining or restoring ecological integrity.

### **3.4 Learn from Experience and Lead by Example**

There is considerable activity and experience in managing human use in Parks Canada. This has included the use of both indirect strategies (e.g., communications, facility design, working with partners) and direct strategies (e.g., zoning, regulations). Some field units are developing and implementing approaches to planning and managing use that are integrative (e.g., Field and Lake Louise Community Plans) and take a greater park ecosystem perspective (Ontario Field Units). Other field units are very advanced in engaging user groups to develop long-term strategies for managing particular activities (e.g., clam harvesting at Kouchibouguac National Park of Canada, snowmobiling at Gros Morne National Park of Canada).

Parks Canada will place a priority on learning from these experiences (adaptive management) and sharing the knowledge acquired with other parts of the organization so that contemporary policies, regulations, and associated planning, consultation and collaborative approaches are developed and used throughout the program. Through improved national direction, professional development and networking, Parks Canada staff, working with key stakeholders, will improve their consistency and coordination in managing human use.

### **3.5 Report on Progress**

Parks Canada, working in collaboration with others, is making progress in improving EI and the quality of opportunities for understanding, appreciation and enjoyment through managing human use. Emphasis will need to be placed on making effective use of communications both internally and externally to demonstrate short and intermediate term results in managing human use. This can be accomplished through an array of media, such as existing reports, the internet/intranet, forums, and demonstration projects. State of Parks Reports will play a key role in reporting within the continuum of planning, implementing and reporting.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

“One of the most important questions of the future will turn on the relationship between human societies and natural systems upon which we all, in the end depend” (15). The need for strategic direction for human use management is clear. Many of the tools and mechanisms that are needed already exist, they just need to be used to their fullest potential, in an integrated and collaborative environment, supported by sound science.

In addition to the above, a greater ecosystem perspective and the support of a well-developed and focused communication strategy/mechanism that informs, influences and involves Canadians and Parks Canada staff alike, are required.

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